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ABSTRACT

A summer employment and training project for high school dropouts was conducted at Florida's Pensacola Junior College (PJC) through the college's Adult High School. The program participants were economically disadvantaged teenagers who were eligible for Job Training Partnership Act funding. All but four of the 20 participants were high school dropouts, and eight either had children or were pregnant. The program was designed to improve the participants' reading and writing skills, encourage the participants to return to high school, and introduce the study of journalism to nontraditional students through the production of four newsletters and one videotape documentary. The students' typical day consisted of two hours of academic course work and five hours of paid work time. Four student crew leaders worked an additional 12 hours per week. The 16 dropouts enrolled in a high school level refresher English course, while the four crew leaders enrolled in a college-credit course, "Feature Article Writing." Work crews consisting of four high school students and one crew leader completed various job assignments. An evaluation of the project underscored the importance of institutional leadership in the day-to-day operations of the project to resolve such issues as the use of college vehicles to transport students to worksites; the use of PJC's public television station to produce the videotape documentary; and the development of good relations between crew leaders and members and between participants and the project supervisors. Pre- and post-test scores revealed significant gains in students' reading skills and smaller gains in language and math skills. All but one of the students completed the employment component of the project, and 75% passed their summer English course. (WJT)

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A Qualitative Study of a Community College Program For High School Dropouts

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PROJECT DESIGN:

Pensacola Junior College (PJC) is a comprehensive two-year public institution located on the Gulf Coast in Northwest Florida. Having opened its doors in 1948, the institution now serves more than 31,000 non-duplicating students annually on its three campuses and various centers. An Adult High School is located at the Pensacola campus, providing an alternative education high school completion program for dropouts 16 years of age and above.

A summer employment and training project for twenty (20) students was conducted at PJC as a supplemental service through the Adult High School. Participants were economically disadvantaged Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Title II-B eligible. Sixteen (16) of the participants were high school dropouts. The remaining four (4) youth were crew leaders. Crew leaders were composed of two (2) white male and two (2) white female college students, with an average age of 19 years. They were responsible for directly supervising the high school dropouts.

The high school dropout group was composed of 13 female and 3 male youth, with an average age of 17 years. Racial characteristics were 12 white and 4 black, which is an equivalent ratio to the overall Adult High School student population. In addition to the barriers of low-economic conditions and dropout status, many of these students possessed additional hardships; 5 students were teenage parents while 3 additional students were

pregnant. Other barriers which some of the participants had included learning deficiencies and criminal records. In summary, these 16 youth were some of the most disadvantaged students in the Adult High School.

The goal of the program was to blend high school alternative education with a college summer employment journalism assignment. To accomplish this goal, the following objectives were established:

1. Improve the reading and writing skills of the participants as measured by pre and post tests.
2. Increase the completion rate of an english class and encourage the participants to return to high school.
3. Introduce the study of journalism to non-traditional students through the production of four (4) newsletters and one (1) video tape documentary.

The journalism assignment involved gathering news information on the county-wide JTPA Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP). Approximately 150 public non-profit worksites provided placement for over 750 youth during the summer. News reporting thus was designed to reflect the summer job activities of youth, as seen by youth. This spirit of reporting emerged when the crew selected a name; Journalism Instruction Project for Summer Youth (JIPSY).

The original concept for this project focused on two strengths within PJC. One is the student newspaper, The Corsair, which has won national awards and recognition. The other strength is the

public television station, WSRE-23, which has recently demonstrated a significant increase in local membership support from 2,500 people to 7,000 people over the last two years. Both the newspaper and the television station were viewed as excellent training grounds on which to provide students with a valuable summer experience.

The typical day was structured in two parts, 2 hours academic and 5 hours of paid work time. Crew leaders worked an additional 12 hours per week. A majority of the time consisted of hands-on work experience. Work crews consisting of four high school students and one crew leader completed various job assignments. This structure of small group interaction was intended to create a sense of group identity.

Academic credit was available through the Adult High School and also the college. The sixteen (16) dropouts enrolled in high school level Refresher English. A college credit course, Feature Article Writing, was offered to the four (4) crew leaders. In addition, three (3) of the high school students were dual enrolled receiving both college and high school credit. The academic classroom component provided training in the following areas:

- English composition
- Newspaper & TV writing skills
- Introduction to desk-top publishing
- Introduction to newspaper & TV reporting
- TV production techniques

This broad assortment of communication skills touched on such academic fields as public relations, broadcasting, journalism, computers and English. The project intended to experientially demonstrate a relationship between classroom studies and employment. Further, by maintaining an affiliation with an educational program throughout the summer, it was hoped that these youth would be more likely to continue their education in the Fall of 1989.

A college English instructor was hired to teach both summer English classes to the 20 participants, with the specific purpose of coordinating the classroom experience with the work experience. The classes met in the journalism work area at times and in the traditional classroom at other times, thus blending the work experience environment with the classroom. Many classroom assignments and activities complemented the job experience or could be completed during the work day on the job. The blending of work with the classroom was also designed to create a sense of belonging in each crew member not normally experienced in the typical classroom. A feeling of team ownership was further fostered by the production of the newsletters and video tape.

In 1988/89, there was a 55% dropout rate at the Adult High School. This rate is alarming in view of the fact that the Adult High School is likely the last opportunity for dropout youth to

obtain a high school diploma. Once out of Adult High, a GED is typically the last option for an immediate completion of school. Without a high school diploma, many of these dropouts will stumble into the negative cycle of unemployment, underemployment, drug abuse, and/or crime. This program was an attempt to utilize an innovative approach to attack the problems of student failure and withdrawal. If learning English could become more significant to these 16 students, then not only would basic reading and writing skills improve, but completion rates and continuation rates in high school would also improve.

The objectives of completion, continuation, and basic skills improvement were based on past studies. In one summer research project which was pilot tested in five cities nationally (Public/Private Ventures, 1986) it was found that SYETP students can overcome a decrease in basic skills (reading and math) during the summer vacation when school is not in session. This was accomplished through a JTPA funded intervention strategy. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1987) specifically recommended such interventions designed to reverse a decrease in basic skills through a SYETP emphasis on education. Objectives of the JIPSY summer project focused on this strategy.

Data from the JIPSY project was gathered from a combination of sources. One of the research team members, as well as a project supervisor, maintained journals throughout the duration of the

project. Another research team member conducted qualitative observations of all participants. In addition, participant viewpoints were gathered from a "personal statement" journalism assignment and from a pre/post open ended questionnaire. Further, documentation was obtained from pre/post scores on the standardized Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Academic grades and the return to school rate of the students in the Fall of 1990 were also used. The four (4) newsletters and the video tape footage provided documentation of both academic and work related activities. Additional data concerning administrative policy and the decision making process were collected from the Provost in charge of the campus.

FINDINGS:

The concept of leadership was a common theme which emerged from data analyses. This was particularly evident from the journals and student questionnaires. Part of the leadership issue concerned organizational functions related to the daily activities of the project. Some examples include time management, work and classroom scheduling, purchase orders, use of college vans, payroll and similar operational tasks. For example, the management review of the college van usage captures some weaknesses in organizational practices within the college.

Prior to this project, all individuals requesting to drive a

college van were required to be employees of PJC. No written procedures for use of college vehicles existed. When JIPSY crew leaders requested use of the college vans, concern was raised by college staff. Prior to this project there had been no requests from the Adult High School for use of college vehicles. The vans being requested for high school student use raised the consciousness of the administration to the liability associated with vehicle use. This question would not have been a concern if the Provost had not been directly involved with the project as a research team member. Transportation of crews to work sites was vital to the summer project. Reporting, interviewing and video taping required weekly site visits. However, because of the resulting organizational confusion, crew leaders often used their personal cars. A consequence of this project is the establishment of formal written guidelines for use of college vehicles.

Another example of organizational leadership within the college involved the production of the video tape. The administrative perception of the management of its public television station was severely challenged as a result of this project. WSRE-23 is a public television station owned and operated by Pensacola Junior College (PJC). The Director of the station reports to the Provost on the Pensacola Campus. A new Director for the public television station was hired in 1988. An immediate priority for the new director was to straighten out the management of the

station. Towards this end, a detailed management plan was implemented under the approval of the Provost.

Within six months, the television productions improved. The day-to-day management improved along with the long-range planning. Two specific television projects which were planned through the Provost's Office were expertly completed. It was thought that the television production staff had gained the necessary skills to produce a quality product. In addition, attitude and morale seemed at an all-time high.

In the 1989-90 summer term, the staff within the station was asked to participate in the JIPSY program. The Director and staff of WSRE-23 accepted the challenge to participate in the project. The Provost told the staff assigned to the project that if they had any problems, to advise him. At this same time, the Provost was involved in the planning of another television production which proceeded very smoothly.

It wasn't until the beginning of the fall term, 1989-90, that the Provost was called in to review the final video tape product. The viewing of the final product was a terrible disappointment. The quality of the production was poor along with the sequencing of the program. Upon asking what had happened, the Provost was told that the television production staff ran into problems working with the non-traditional students who were assigned to

this product. Even though the WSRE-23 staff had received adequate skill and knowledge training to produce quality programming on this project, they had failed to produce a quality project. The Provost had requested that the program be re-edited before distribution. This was accomplished and a final tape was presented to the JTPA Private Industry Council in February, 1990.

The leadership theme also captured data related to personnel. In this respect, the project appears to have uncovered some interesting concerns. Specifically, personnel leadership between the dropouts and crew leaders, as well as between all of the participants and the project supervisors was not ideal.

Debbie, for example, dropped out of the program during the third week. While riding in the college van to visit worksites, Debbie claims to have been "picked on" by two of the crew leaders. Debbie explained to one of the project supervisors that she had been singled out and ridiculed for smoking on the bus. One of the crew leaders however stated that he had "trashed" one of her stories. He felt that his critique was fair. In either case, her quitting the program was the end result.

Both project supervisors attempted to use this event as a lesson for the crew leaders. Debbie was perceived as a withdrawn and self-conscious 17 year old with poor English skills. However, the crew leaders failed to adjust their expectations of her

behavior and work performance. Unfortunately, the supervisors were unable to persuade Debbie to return or for the crew leaders to acknowledge the need for mixing reality with encouragement when dealing with crew members.

The personnel leadership issue also offered some examples of participants demonstrating significant personal growth. Reviewing the blooper footage from video tape production provided an ideal source of data regarding student growth. Initial assessment of the 16 students revealed that all 16 demonstrated various forms of inhibition when called upon to express themselves verbally. The video tape footage was produced toward the end of the summer experience. Although the bloopers involved speech errors, in each case the student was able to laugh about the mistake and strive to successfully complete the taping. Linda for example found the JIPSY program to be very beneficial. In an interview Linda stated that her summer training "...helps me talk to people. I'm shy." During one of the blooper sequences, Linda was attempting to introduce a worker and supervisor at one of the worksites. Although she appeared to be under pressure from the camera Linda demonstrated an ability to control her apprehensions and successfully complete the interview. This was accomplished amongst numerous humorous distractions by her co-workers and bystanders. Linda perceived herself as "shy" yet, the video footage revealed a person who was correcting her own verbal errors and demonstrating self-control.

Both Debbie and Linda represent their own perspectives to the issue of personnel leadership. This issue however was apparent throughout analysis of the data, thus establishing triangulation of evidence. The following summary attempts to capture an overview of this pattern.

Although all three groups of participants; crew members, crew leaders and project supervisors expressed frustration over group leadership, no one group was perceived as singularly responsible. Two of the crew leaders for example, referred to one of the project supervisors as having a "messiah complex." This was defined as; "He thinks he can do everything and only by himself." Both crew leaders wanted to see more hands-on work experience for themselves and the crew members. On a different occasion the project supervisor expressed frustration with the same two crew leaders for turning in a story on one of the worksites. "They haven't even made an effort to involve the students in writing the story - half their kids didn't have notebooks."

JTPA program monitors reported to the PIC administration concern that the students were not adequately involved in newsletter production. Participation appeared limited to completion of the first draft of newsletters. The PIC Director cited this when suggesting that the newsletters looked too professional. Yet, in reviewing the newsletters and video tape footage, student involvement was clearly evident. Examples of photographs,

poetry, and computer lay-out editing particularly stand out. In fact, the project supervisor refers to the exceptional commitment of two of the crew members; "I couldn't be more pleased in these two kids. They have a lot of heart, and they are willing to put in extra time without expecting anything in return. I hope that some employer appreciates their talents someday."

Participation was evident throughout the project however, common agreement on satisfactory participation was not achieved. Thus, it appears that some of the students were able to gain more training from the journalism work experience than others. The leadership issue therefore appears to have impacted the perceived effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

One of the research team members compiled quantitative data on the summer project as stipulated by the JTPA contract. The following data is provided for descriptive purposes to further supplement the qualitative findings.

The 16 students were tested in three areas: reading, language, and math. Two of these areas, reading and language, were treated by participation in the summer journalism project. The third area, math, was not treated and therefore acted as a control variable. Using a test for correlated data or paired observations, a significant difference was found at the 0.025 level for reading. No significant difference was found in

language or math. Even though the language scores did not show statistical differences, they improved nonetheless. In fact, language scores showed an increase of 10.53 scale score points - more than both reading (7.85) and math (3.35). Refer to Table I:

TABLE I

Pre-test to Post-test Changes in Reading, Language and Math

	Pre-test	Post-test	Change	t value
Reading	767.7	775.6	7.85	2.216 *
Language	732.6	743.0	10.53	1.339
Math	786.7	790.0	3.35	0.718

* Significantly different at the .025 level

Reading scores showed the highest number of students improving (71%) while language scores showed 54% of students improving, and math scores showed 36% of students improving. The number of students decreasing in reading was 21%, in language 23%, and in math 50%. Refer to Table II:

TABLE II

Number of Students Increasing and Decreasing on Pre-Post Measurement

	Increase	Decrease	No Change
Reading	10 (71%)	3 (21%)	1
Language*	7 (54%)	3 (23%)	3
Math	5 (36%)	7 (50%)	2

* 1 student answered the language post test randomly and was not included in the results.

JIPSY students completed high school English classes at a rate of 42% before entering the summer program. In contrast, at the conclusion of the summer English class, 75% of the JIPSY students had completed the class and earned credit. Refer to Table III:

TABLE III

Completion Rate of English Classes by JIPSY Students
(baseline and completion of program)

	Completion Rate
Baseline (prior to JIPSY program)	42%
JIPSY English Class	75%

Fifteen of the sixteen participants (94%) completed the work portion of the program. Twelve students (75%) completed the summer English class with a passing grade. One student received a "W" (withdrawal), and three received an "I" (incomplete). Three students chose to duel enroll in the college course simultaneous with the high school English class and two of the three earned dual credit. In comparison, Adult High students completed courses at a rate of 44.9% during the 1988/89 year. Refer to Table IV:

TABLE IV

Completion rate of classes and JIPSY Program

	Completion Rate
All Adult High Students, 1988-89	44.9%
JIPSY students - work	94%
JIPSY students - academic	75%

The positive results regarding completion and continuation rates of JIPSY students apply to the short term as well as the long term; that is, in the summer English class as well as in continuation of high school. Only two JIPSY students did not continue uninterruptedly in school upon completion of the program. It should be noted that both of these students stayed out for one term to give birth, but returned for the next term's enrollment. Nonetheless, the uninterrupted continuation rate for JIPSY students was 88%.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Upon reviewing this project from start to finish, there are a number of administrative actions recommended. Personnel involved in projects with non-traditional students should undergo special training which addresses the attitudes and value systems of the non-traditional student. For example, even though the staff had the knowledge and skill training necessary to produce a quality television production, they lacked the skills in dealing with the non-traditional student. Training in the future should include:

(1) addressing the values and attitudes of non-traditional students.

(2) a short course on how to teach others specific job tasks.

(3) discussing attitudes and values of all personnel involved in the project - specifically emphasizing the role each of them play influencing the behavior of the non-traditional student - each must be a strong role model.

Additionally, in future projects of this nature, it is recommended that the Provost conduct a 30-minute monitoring session with all personnel involved to ensure problem areas are addressed immediately and not allowed to continue throughout the project. Bi-weekly meetings should be conducted with the non-traditional students to review goals and objectives of the project. In effect, a more structured monitoring system is necessary when working with non-traditional students to ensure not only a quality product but also a change in attitude for all who are involved in such a project.

Student input into the finished products (newsletters and video tape) was another important issue worth noting. Although students worked daily on these projects, they were not allowed adequate input into the final editing, review and production. Students worked in all areas of production, but emphasis was placed on the first draft completion only. The supervisor and crew leaders felt it was their responsibility as the experts to edit, critique, and perfect the work for the finished product. Possibly, if the students had been allowed to participate in more of the editing and review of their original work, language skills scores, which include mechanics and expression may have shown an even higher rate of improvement. Apparently reading (vocabulary and comprehension) skills were well utilized by the program format.

Another point worth mentioning is that this program did not focus on individual lesson plans, tutoring, or computer assisted training as a supplement to the work experience and English class. Many JTPA summer programs with remedial education objectives have utilized these supplements. Dropout prevention programs utilize these also, as well as learning disability classes. In contrast, many gifted programs utilize hands-on experience. As an exception to the trend, the JIPSY program sought to teach reading and writing skills to a disadvantaged population through relevant work experience. It was not concerned primarily with the input of knowledge and facts into student minds. Individual lesson plans, tutoring, and computer assisted training are all excellent methods for gaining knowledge. However, this program attempted to take the next step by focusing on a relevant, practical application of knowledge and facts. Thus, gains made in this program are incorporated into the students' lives and, hopefully, become more permanent and create such long-term effects as future completion of classes and continuation in education. It appears that the program did indeed have this effect. Considering the type of disadvantaged student enrolled in this program, results are extremely positive.

Future programs should focus on the structure of leadership, management, and organization before starting. While program management and leadership suffered, causing negative experiences from the supervisor down to the working students, positive

results were still seen. The high rate of completion in the work portion of the program (94%) for example, suggests that mentoring from crew leaders, and a spirit of belonging amongst the entire group was beneficial. The value of leadership training is essential to the overall benefit of this intervention strategy. One could conjecture that a well managed program of this type with strong leadership and organization would likely produce a powerful vehicle for the turn around of disadvantaged, dropout youth toward educational and career success.

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